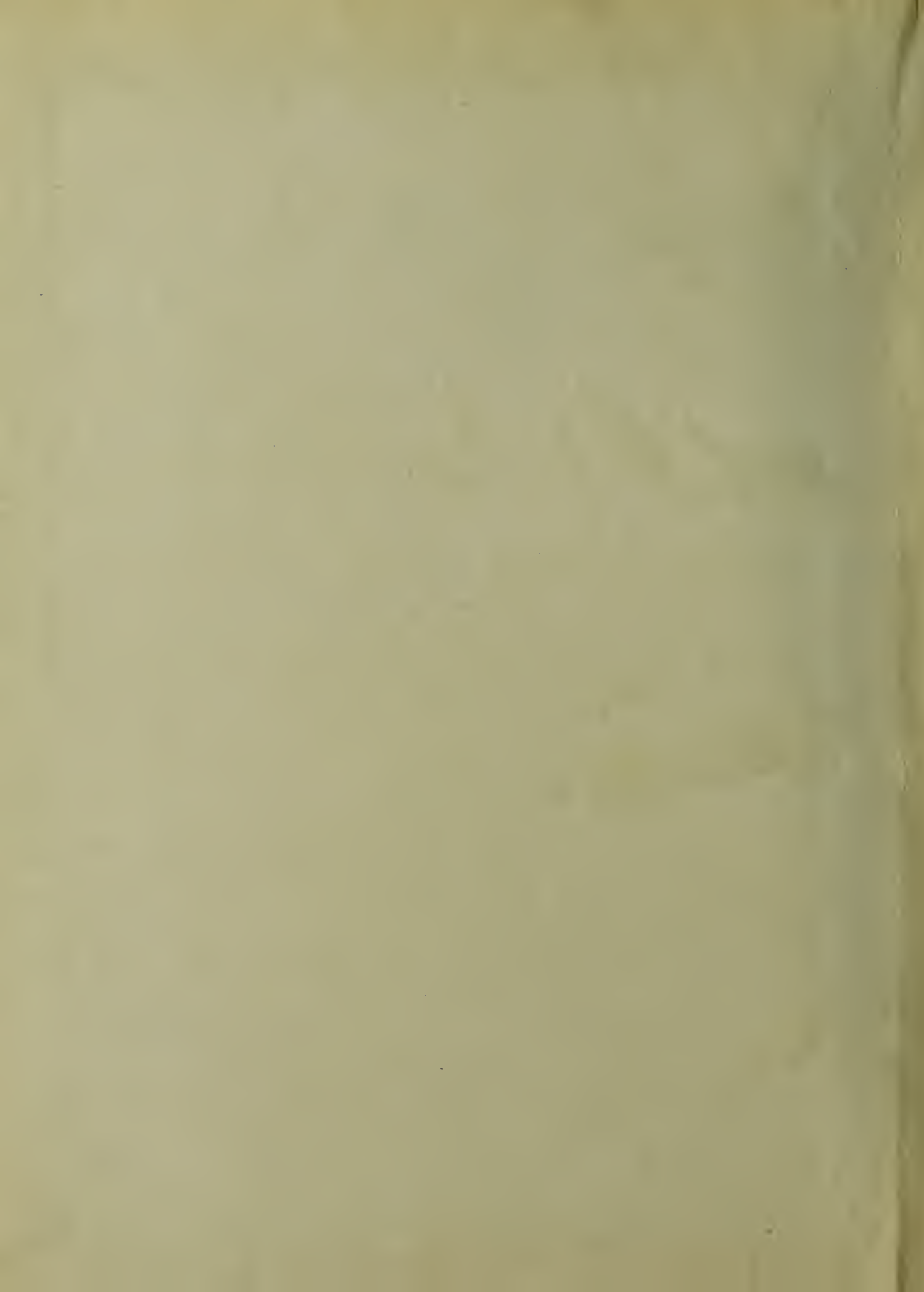



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PREFACES TO THE DRAMAS OF THE FRENCH
ROMANTIC SCHOOL

BY

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A. B. Ohio Wesleyan University, 1912

THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
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CHAPTER I.

Victor Hugo and the Préface de Cromwell.

In France, the eighteenth century was an age of reason. Everything was considered from a scientific point of view. As scholars broke away from the dogmatism of the century of Louis XIV, they had a more sympathetic comprehension of life. The quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns was but one manifestation of their belief in the perfectibility of man. They rejected the authority imposed by the Classicists in all phases of life. The writers of this century were no longer proud of an elegant and pompous style, characteristic of the seventeenth century. Sentences were simple in construction; words had very definite connotations and were used almost as mathematical symbols. The various scientific subjects were popularized and thus brought before the general public. It was an age of experiment and invention. Only the "belles lettres" in the strictest sense of the term conformed to the cut and dried rules. This striving of the nation towards freedom culminated in the French Revolution. It cannot be denied that the writers of the eighteenth century helped to bring about this Revolution, consciously or unconsciously. Yet it was for social, religious and political freedom. Society cannot be shaken to the very foundations without affecting the whole structure. In the field of literature the Romantic movement is a reaction against the formal elegance of the seventeenth century and against the primarily scientific style of the eighteenth century. It was indeed a reaction and not a renaissance.

Among the younger men of France who were striving for a literature both natural and artistic was Victor Hugo. From 1827, when his Preface to Cromwell appeared, until the production of Les Burgraves in 1843, he was the undisputed chief of the Romantic School. These dates cover the period of his dramatic work.

Hugo was once asked by Monsieur Taylor, royal commissioner of the Théâtre Français, if the theater did not attract him. Whereupon, Hugo answered that he was then writing his first drama, Cromwell. According to the story told in Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*, he met Talma, the great actor, at a dinner party. The latter was very favorably impressed by the reading of the first two acts of the play. Arrangements were made then and there for him to create the role of Cromwell. However, before the play was finished Talma died. Cromwell was never played; surely not for this reason alone; but rather because of its great length, the many characters and above all its lack of conformity to the set standards of tragedy. The play was finished in the summer of 1827 and published the following December. The preface which accompanied it is a sketch of literary history, an attack against the theory of the beautiful, against the rules, and against imitation of the ancients as upheld by the Classicists. It was a decisive document which marked the line between the two schools. As the manifesto of a new school it may be compared with the poetic program of la Pléiade**. Gautier said of it: La préface de Cromwell rayonne à nos yeux comme les tables de la Loi sur le Sinaï***. It was as important in Hugo's development as in that of Romanticism. He has been severely criticized for his historical statements. One critic**** goes so far as to say that the ideas on the history of poetry are his, but that they are all false; his ideas on the composition of drama are correct and just, but they are not his own. Furthermore, he says: "Si le retentissement de son manifeste a été si considérable, c'est précisément parce que ce manifeste venait à son heure; c'est parce que l'auteur avait mis son admirable talent d'écrivain au service d'idées acceptées déjà par presque toute la jeunesse lettrée et applaudies

*Vol. II, pp. 158-9, Ed. 1863.

**J. du Bellay, Défense et Illustration de la langue française. 1549

***Théophile Gautier, Histoire du Romantisme. 1907.

****Edmond Biré, Victor Hugo avant 1830, pp. 426-7.

chaque soir au théâtre":*

A natural division of the preface is into two parts: first, the history of poetry; second, Hugo's theories on the construction of the drama. In the first of these two sections Hugo divides the history of man into three periods, primitive, ancient, and modern. Primitive man being still close to God, expressed himself only in hymns: his lyre had only three chords, God, the soul, and creation: his thought was still in a formative state, changing as he changed his place of dwelling. This solitary and nomadic life, unrestricted by any conventions of society was propitious for poetry. Primitive man was a poet and his poetry was lyric. All his meditations were ecstasies. Prayer was his religion and the ode was his poetry. As time passed the family became an institution and developed into the tribe, later into the nation. Civilization became more complex, so both religion and government had to take on some form. Poetry began to reflect the great events of national interest, thus passing from ideas to things. This was the time of the epic, represented by Homer.

The modern period began with Christianity. Society was revolutionized by this spiritual religion which replaced the materialistic paganism of the preceding ages. It was a religion of equality, liberty and light. The gospels made a full and luminous revelation of truth. "Pythagore, Epicure, Socrate, Platon, sont des flambeaux: le Christ, c'est le jour".** One of the most fundamental truths was the fact that man has a double nature and destiny, a soul and a body. Quite contrary to the ancient idea, there is an abyss between God and man, between the soul and the body. The Greek heroes, for instance, were almost equal to their gods. Furthermore, great catastrophes came formerly only to kings; the masses never felt them. In the reorganization of society the people could not help but feel its effects. Man began to consider himself and to pity his condition. A new feeling,

*Ibid. p. 437.

**Préface de Cromwell, Ed. Oeuvres Complètes. (Ed. ne varietur) p. 13.

more than seriousness and less than sadness, developed. What had been despair with the ancients became melancholy. Upon this new religion and this new society is built a new poetry, which depicts both the beautiful and the ugly aspects of life. It combines the two elements without confounding them. A new type is introduced into literature and a new form evolved. This new type is the grotesque and this new form is comedy. Contrast is found everywhere in nature: the sublime and the grotesque, the good together with the bad, the beautiful next to the ugly. The grotesque is in Hugo's mind a positive factor in the aesthetic world. It is a distortion of the beautiful which may be comic, but does not necessarily appeal to our sense of humor. Consequently, the ugly which is the antithesis of the beautiful must not be confused with the grotesque.

It is a fact that this is a tendency of modern times only. "Du jour où le christianisme a dit à l'homme:- Tu es double, tu es composé de deux êtres, l'un périssable, l'autre immortel, l'un charnel, l'autre éthère . . . de ce jour le drame a été créé. La poésie née du christianisme, la poésie de notre temps est donc le drame"* As a matter of contrast, the grotesque is the richest source that nature can open up to art. It makes beauty grander, purer, and more sublime. For us, beauty is a simple harmonious form; but what we call ugly is a detail that is out of harmony with the whole. Beauty, therefore, has only one type where the ugly has many. It is interesting to study the development of the grotesque throughout the ages. On the great cathedrals monsters are carved along the friezes, in the arches and on the columns. The Spanish comedy had the "graciosos" to amuse the people, the kings had jesters for their own enjoyment. Even in religious services there are superstitions mingled with the divine. So throughout modern times the grotesque is found in architecture, literature, customs and religion. The time has come when these two elements must find their equilibrium. The beautiful will soon take its place above the grotesque but it must never exclude it entirely. This

*Ibid. p. 30.

new combination of the grotesque and the sublime in literature is the drame. True and complete poetry is in the harmony of contrasts. If we separate the grotesque from the sublime, we leave between them the real tragedy on one side, comedy on the other, but between these two forms is the drame to represent man as he is. At the summit of this new form of literature is Shakespeare, the trinity of Corneille, Molière, and Beaumarchais.

There cannot be any exposition of the principles of the Romantic drama without a discussion of the rules of the unities. Of the three, the only essential one is that of action or interest. This one must remain because the mind or eye can grasp only one ensemble at a time. Unity of action is as necessary as the other two are useless. The drama should not have three unities any more than a picture three horizons. However, when the action of the drama is a unit of interest, it gives the correct perspective to the play.

To those who urge us to turn to the ancients as models, we might put this question: Do we find unity of place in their drama? They did not have any change in decorations, that is true, but the stage was so immense a whole city might be represented at once. Going from one part of their stage to another was equivalent to a change in setting on the modern stage. The chorus in the Greek dramas told what was going on in the temple instead of taking the spectator there. When unity of place is insisted upon, we have tableaux and recitations instead of scenes and acting. In the modern drama the appropriate setting is exceedingly important. It makes the action real; and that reality is far more necessary now than in the classical tragedies. Those were not written for the pleasure of the audience, but just to uphold the dignity of the muse of tragedy.

The unity of time is no more essential than the unity of action. An action that is forced into twenty-four hours is just as ridiculous as that forced into a vestibule or any other one place. By enforcing these rules upon men of

genius, we often find mere skeletons in the cage of the unities. "C'est ainsi qu'on a borné l'essor de nos plus grands poètes. C'est avec les ciseaux des unités qu'on leur a coupé l'aile."*

By changing the scenery often and by passing from one time to another, there is, of course, a possibility of confusion in the mind of the audience. Just here, the genius can step in and avoid these lacunae. That is a problem for the poet to solve and not one for the rules of poetry to evade. Great writers have submitted to these rules in the past; but what might they have done had they been left alone and allowed to follow the guidance of their own genius? Even they did not submit without fighting. Corneille argued for the Cid with the critics and poets of his day. After the decision was made against the Cid, he produced plays based on Roman history influenced strongly by his Spanish tendency; which plays are neither Roman nor Castilian. Racine experienced the same treatment, without making a like resistance. He had neither the genius nor the bitter pride of Corneille. "Imitez les modèles! Ce sont les règles qui ont formé les modèles!"** On the other hand they cry; "Les modèles sont inimitables".*** There are two kinds of models, those made from the rules and those from which the rules are made. In which of these categories should genius find a place? The Greek theater has little in common with ours; we cannot imitate it. If we should copy the moderns, we would be imitating imitations. Why should a poet attach himself to any master or copy any model? He should be like a tree, buffeted by all the winds, drawing his inspiration as the tree gets its nourishment from the ground and bearing his works like fruit. It is worth more to be a living, creating force than a parasite. "L'art ne compte pas sur la médiocrité. Elle donne des ailes et non des béquilles".**** The only rules a real poet need follow are the general laws of na-

*Ibid. p. 37.

**Ibid. p. 42.

***Ibid. p. 43.

****Ibid. p. 43.

ture which govern all works of art and the special rules for each subject he treats. The former are like the timber work of a building - they are lasting; the latter are the scaffolding which is only temporary. Let the poet guard against copying anything.

"Nature and truth" is the slogan of Victor Hugo. He was striving for a drama that was true to nature and at the same time artistic. He says, "La vérité de l'art ne saurait être la réalité absolue".* The domains of nature and art are distinct, although they are dependent one upon the other. We must not forget that art is ideal as well as positive and earthly. It has to have certain definite forms of expression, must be governed by precise means of execution. For the true artist, these restrictions are like delicate instruments in the performance of his task. The drama pictures the life and conscience of a man; by its discourses and actions the exterior is shown, but to see the heart of the man we must get an insight into his conscience. This can be done only by depicting nature under the magic wand of art. The theater is the place where everything in nature can and should be represented. The ultimate aim of art is almost divine; if it is making history it resuscitates the past; if it is making poetry, it creates its own world. Only when the drama follows nature in this artistic sense, will it be acknowledged by art. One of the most important things against which the Romantic drama is fighting is the commonplace. There are several ways to eliminate this danger of which the combination of nature and truth in art is one. Growing out of this idea of nature and truth is what we call local color. A bit of scenery or costume alone does not make local color. In addition to these there must be something in the very heart of the drama that will be a vital force. It should be like the sap of a tree, going from the roots to the farthest leaf. It is perfectly obvious that a poet must make some choice in his local color. Let him then choose the character

*Ibid. p. 46.

istic and not the beautiful only. This will give the drama the true local color. If one wished, one could carry the use of local color so far that it would become absurd. No drama would be written in verse, because people speak prose naturally; or le Cid could only speak in Castillian, because he was Spanish. The realism which looks upon life just as it is, but with the emphasis on the ugly and the sordid sides, was not at all Hugo's idea of giving us a drama of life. Everything was idealized, colored by the author. "Comme Dieu, le vrai poète est présent partout à la fois dans son oeuvre. Le génie ressemble au balancier qui imprime l'effigie royale aux pièces de cuivre aux écus d'or."* To do this, takes a little study - so much the better. This study, together with a burning inspiration of a genius, will exclude the common and vulgar.

Perhaps the strongest safeguard against the evil of mediocrity is the Alexandrine verse. Some of the exponents of romantic drama have taken such a stand against anything in the Classic School, that they say drama should be written in prose, which is the natural mode of conversation. So many times the Alexandrine has bored them in its stilted elegance and euphemisms that they have condemned it. It is the poets who have no imagination, no inventive genius, who study hard the "Dictionnaire de rimes", who say that the medium of the drama must be prose. The verse should not be criticized, but the poet. To convince yourself that verse is capable of free expression of truth, study Molière who is indeed dramatic.

"Le vers est la forme optique de la pensée. Voilà pourquoi il convient surtout à la perspective scénique. Il rend plus solide et plus fin le tissu du style. C'est le noeud qui arrête le fil. C'est la ceinture qui soutient le vêtement et lui donne tous ses plis. Que pourraient donc perdre à entrer dans le vers la nature et le vrai?""** The verse must be free and open, daring to say anything

*Ibid. p. 50.

**Ibid. p. 54.

thing, passing quite naturally from tragedy to comedy, with a movable caesura, faithful to rhyme, assuming a thousand forms without changing the character, shunning long tirades, running the gamut of poetic thought, being lyric, epic or dramatic according to the needs: a verse such as a man with the soul of Corneille and the head of Molière would write would be as beautiful as prose.* All other poetry is descriptive, this kind is graphic. An idea expressed in verse becomes more incisive and striking. "C'est le fer qui devient acier".** Writing in prose and verse as Shakespeare did, has its advantages. But as prose is open to even mediocre writers, it is less rich in resources. Anything that is homogenous is more substantial. After all, whether the drama is in prose or verse is perhaps a secondary matter. It will be judged by its intrinsic value and not by its form. The weight which causes the balance to go on one side or another is genius. Prose writer or poet, the author must be correct, not simply on the surface, but deep down in the root of things. He will be master of the grammar and external form, and consequently will have the right to invent his own style. He is free because he is sure. The French language is not fixed, and will never be as long as there is life in it. The language of one century is not the same as that of the preceding centuries. Both may be beautiful in so far as they are original. Each epoch has its own ideas and the words to express them, but the day a language ceases to change and grow it dies.

What does the Romantic drama seek to accomplish? It wants to mingle the sublime and the grotesque, tragedy and comedy, to portray nature and truth in an artistic manner, to have a local color that permeates the play, to use a verse that is not artificial and bound by rules, a language that is characteristic of the personages of the drama. If these things can be accomplished, we shall be freed from a decrepit classicism and a false romanticism.

*Ibid. p. 55.

**Ibid. p. 56.

CHAPTER II.

Sources of the Préface de Cromwell.

In spite of much adverse criticism this preface is one of the lasting documents of Hugo. From its easy and brilliant style one is led to believe that it came from the imagination of the poet himself. However, upon closer analysis one can readily see that Hugo has very skillfully brought together in one document the ideas of others. The fact that its ideas and principles had been proposed by others and had already taken deep root explains why it has lived and why its influence has spread over the whole field of modern drama*.

There was no attempt made in the preface to slander the masterpieces of the Classic School; it fought rather against the pseudo-classical drama. Hugo was versed in the literature of Greece and Rome not through French translations, but in the originals. He made errors in the history of ancient literature, yet this does not weaken the importance of the preface. His division of the history of civilization into three parts, with their respective kinds of literature is original although erroneous, because there are all sorts of literature at all times. In speaking of the literature of the earliest period he says, "Ce poème, cette ode des temps primitifs, c'est la Genèse".** As a matter of fact there is no lyric poetry in the Bible before the time of David and the prophets. Religious sentiment was for Victor Hugo, as for Chateaubriand, the source of lyric poetry. He has made the same mistake in saying that ancient literature was purely epic, not

*"C'est là sa grande force, et c'est ce qui explique son influence, aussi forte dans l'avenir que ses racines sont lointaines dans le passé". - Souriau. Préface de Cromwell. p. 166.

**Préface de Cromwell. p. 9

dramatic nor lyric. It is only necessary to call attention to a few names to refute that idea - Pindare, Sappho, Sophocles and Euripides.* Biré has interpreted this part of the preface, at least, in too narrow a way. He takes these divisions of the history of civilization and their respective literatures literally. Were this a history of literature, that would be the only interpretation to make. However, for the sake of the argument which the author wishes to bring out, these general statements need not be so severely criticized.

His main thesis, that of the grotesque, was known among the ancients. Hugo acknowledges this, but maintains that they tried to hide it. Since the ancients did not reject the idea of the grotesque, the theory of Hugo crumbles at its base, "puis que sa théorie repose tout entier sur ce fait: que le grotesque est un principe étranger à l'antiquité, un type nouveau introduit dans la poésie par les modernes".** The ideas of life in Italy and Spain which came to him when impressions are perhaps vague, have nevertheless left an imprint upon him. These ideas were later strengthened by his reading. The Italian writer, Manzoni was very popular at that time. In 1820, Manzoni wrote a tragedy of five acts in verse***. The charm and purity of the verse has placed it among the classics of Italian literature, but its appearance aroused much criticism; principally because of the author's ignoring the rules of the unities. A French critic, M. Chauvet, praised not only the style, but the perfect unity of action, and severely criticized Manzoni for his failure to adhere to the other unities. These comments only made Manzoni more determined to continue with his dramatic theories. He wrote an answer to M. Chauvet, in which he stated the reasons which had led him to adopt these theories.

*Biré - Victor Hugo avant 1830. pp. 423-430.

**Ibid. p. 430.

***Carmagnola

In an answer* to the article of Chauvet on Carmagnola, Manzoni exposes the reasons for his ideas of romanticism. Among other things he says that the public is so accustomed to the rules of the unities that it requires an effort to judge impartially any work that fails to follow them**. The rules do not help the action of the play, they are a positive detriment. To make the events happen within twenty-four hours, the action is often too hurried, because in history very few events occur within the prescribed number of hours or in a single place.*** The psychology of the characters is likewise false to life. Either the passions are given an artificial energy****, or love must be made the strongest of all, which alone needs not be exaggerated to be dramatic*****. This is clearly brought out by Manzoni's comparison of Othello and Zaire*****. The plots are practically the same; how much more logical is Othello since the events of the play come in the time which they would naturally take. In Zaire, between morning and night, Orosmane goes from perfect confidence to the committing of a crime. In Othello, we see the terrible consequences of a jealousy aroused by a cold-blooded scoundrel; but Voltaire has been obliged to invent causes to confirm the suspicions of Orosmane. The crime of the former is a natural consequence of a perverse nature, aroused by jealousy. That of Orosmane shows us that strange things may happen in one day, which may lead to a crime.

Manzoni proves, by his analysis of Andromaque, that love in the French tragedy becomes tyrannical and peculiar*****. Although he preferred the tragedy, he predicted the drame which was later developed. His conclusions were that no

*Manzoni, Lettre à M. Chauvet sur les Unités de temps et de lieu, in Opere. Vol. III.

**Ibid. p. 314.

***Ibid. pp. 341-9.

****Ibid. pp. 358-9.

*****Ibid. pp. 362-4.

*****Ibid. pp. 364-9.

*****Ibid. pp. 327-9.

general laws could be made. Each subject must have its own particular rules.

This idea of romanticism coming from a friendly author, attracted Hugo and undoubtedly helped him to crystalize his own ideas. He adopted the creed of Manzoni, that, of the three unities, only the unity of action or interest is essential: that each author should write according to the subject he was treating and not be held down by any rules or models, for in fact, one of the beauties of the classic drama was that it was original.

Spain influenced Hugo even more than Italy. To the literature and art of that country he owes the main argument of the Preface. Just as the ugly and grotesque are combined with the beautiful in the great cathedral at Burgos and in the paintings of Murillo, Hugo wished to combine them in the drama. We cannot push this point too far, nor is it necessary to do so, because this theory once in the mind of the author was perhaps only enriched and developed by the antithesis in the art and literature of Spain.

Whatever one may be inclined to think, Hugo was more French than even he believed himself to be, or than others have thought him to be. He was revolutionary in his ideas, greatly influenced by foreign literature; still he belongs to a French school. He knew Germany only indirectly since he knew nothing of the German language. Through translations he learned enough to make him esteem highly the science and literature of that country. Schlegel's "Cours de Littérature Dramatique"* had a certain influence on Hugo. Schlegel criticized the French dramatists for adhering too closely to the principle of authority. All of their defects, he asserted came from following blindly the rules of the unities. Furthermore, the Alexandrine verse was the cause of the artificiality of the characters. It permitted no ordinary word to be used. This led to paraphrasing which was most unnatural. After summing up the mistakes of the past, Schlegel, too, prophesies the new

*Translated into French, 1814.

"drame": Schlegel cannot be recognized as the true romantic theorist because he did not understand the French theatre. He asserted that Corneille lacked intelligence and the sentiment of love; although he considered Racine in general superior to Pradon, he thought the latter's *Phèdre* was superior to Racine's. He was not an apostle of romanticism in general; he was limited to German genius, with subjects drawn from German history.

We find in Schlegel's work certain ideas which were of French origin. For that reason we must not exaggerate the effect of his ideas on the Préface de Cromwell. The influence of Christianity on the human passions and on melancholy, the new conception of love and of honor are both more French than German. These ideas were expressed also by Mme. de Staël. She wrote about Germany as she had seen it, having spent some years there interviewing many men of letters, gathering information for her work, "De l'Allemagne". In this book she has given some of the theories of Schlegel, under whom she studied at Vienna in 1808. She does not repeat them docilely for we find the best part of her book is a result of her discussions with him. Her conclusions are that the French theater cannot accept the mingling of the different genres to the extent that the German theater does. She frankly admits that the drame is inferior to the tragedy because the former tends towards illusion. Mme. de Staël would hardly have recognized her "Allemagne" in the Préface, but with Paul Albert** one might concede that Hugo borrowed from her

*Souriau, Préface de Cromwell. p. 27. "Schlegel annonce son avenir, esquisse le drame nouveau, romantique, admettant le mélange de la familiarité et de la noblesse dans le langage et l'esprit d'un seul personnage, permettant l'union du comique et du tragique dans la même pièce, recommandant la fidélité historique, sans la faire consister dans la vérité des costumes, reconnaissant enfin dans Shakespeare le maître du théâtre.

**La Littérature Française au XIX siècle pp. 244-5.

the two great divisions of literature; the one before and the one after Christ.

There was also, at this period, a growing interest in the works of Shakespeare in France. In 1822 a group of actors came over from London to present a repertory of English plays, chiefly the dramas of Shakespeare. These plays were given at the Théâtre de la Porte - St. Martin. The triumph of the English at Waterloo and the consequent fall of the Bourbons had not been forgotten. The French public were in no mood to appreciate the beauties of Hamlet and Othello. The actors were scoffed at and driven from the stage. One can readily see that they were hooting the English actors and not Shakespeare. Public opinion was doomed to change in a very short time; for in six years these same plays were received with great applause. Another group of actors, including the great Kemble and Miss Smithson, came to the Odéon. This was in September 1827. The enthusiasm of the Romantic writers, artists and musicians knew no bounds. It was after the success of these plays that Hugo published Cromwell. "Chose remarquable! ce novateur a toujours marché derrière le succès."* It is significant that Hugo should have chosen an English subject for the drama which was to be the embodiment of his dramatic ideas. He was undoubtedly influenced by Shakespeare in combining tragedy and comedy, in using words that are natural, and in breaking away from the unities. Hugo does not go as far as to uphold Shakespeare in his use of blank verse and prose, but stands firmly with the classic authors on this ground. The Alexandrine verse, made less monotonous by the mobile caesura and enjambement, was the only form for drama.

So, Hugo recognized that he did not have in Shakespeare a real ally for the work he had in mind. What was received by the French from an English dramatist would not necessarily be welcomed from a French author. He definitely sepa-

*Biré - Victor Hugo avant 1830. p. 437.

rated the dramatic form from the lyric and epic, yet he acknowledges that Shakespeare has mingled them very skillfully. He calls him the epitome of the drama, the union of the three characteristic geniuses of the French stage - Corneille's tragedy, Molière's comedy of character and Beaumarchais' comedy of intrigue or situation. The representations of the English troupe impressed Hugo, but it did not influence him unduly, for Hugo would not imitate anyone, even as great as Shakespeare.

There are really three distinct parts in the preface; imitations, original errors and new truths.* The theories of the preface have been found in Schlegel, in Mme. de Staël, Manzoni and Stendhal. Even this list is not complete, for in the eighteenth century Diderot, La Motte and Mercier had attacked the tragedy, but failed to carry out their theories. The great merit of Hugo's preface is that it brought together, in a brilliant way, theories which had heretofore been scattered far and wide. As long as they were disseminated, they lacked force. Although Hugo has been influenced by some and has borrowed ideas from his predecessors, the preface is original. It has put in clear and striking figures what had formerly been obscure ideas. He said that some of his contemporaries had already attacked, both by theory and practice, the laws of the unities**. And furthermore he recognized that he was pleading for a cause which was popular, if not already won, for he says he writes for "ce public dont l'éducation est si avancée et que tant de remarquables écrits, de critiques ou d'application, livres ou journaux, ont déjà mûri pour l'art".***

*M. Souriau. - De la Convention dans la Tragédie classique et dans le drame romantique. p. 83.

**Préface de Cromwell. p. 34.

***Ibid. p. 70.

CHAPTER III.

Other Prefaces of Hugo, de Vigny and Dumas.

A. The Censorship.

The plays of a foreign writer were enjoyed by a comparatively limited number of people. It was now for the French writers to dare to follow where Shakespeare had led. In the early part of 1829, Alexandre Dumas wrote Henri III et Sa Cour and a little later, June 24, 1829, Victor Hugo's Marion de Lorme was finished. After several theaters had competed for the play, the Théâtre Français was preparing to produce it. Just at this moment, the government intervened. In the fourth act, the king Louis XIII appears in a pitiable manner; he is only the tool of his powerful minister Cardinal Richelieu. Because of frequent attacks from all sides upon the House of Bourbon, M. de Martignac, the Home Minister, prohibited the performance. The author appealed immediately to Charles X, who received him kindly, but was unable to rescind the order. As a sort of indemnity, he offered Hugo an additional two thousand francs to his pension. These terms Hugo refused; whereupon he became more popular than ever.

Three months later the real battle of the Romanticists began. Not daunted by the government's prohibition of Marion de Lorme, and believing firmly, as the other young Romantic writers believed, that no amount of arguing or writing would win their cause, Hugo wrote Hernani and definitely planned to make a fight for his dramatic theories. February 25, 1830, the date when Hernani was first performed, saw the beginning of the campaign for freedom in art. The people were thoroughly in harmony with social and political freedom; why was the theater re-

stricted? Literature must have the same motto as politics "Tolerance and Liberty!" Hernani was a play addressed to the public, to be received or rejected by it. It is a work of conscience and liberty; the first stone of an edifice, which exists only in the mind of the author*. There are really two kinds of public, the reading public and the audience at the theater. What the one accepts, the other may reject. But it was not so with the productions of Hernani. With the help of friends and after a struggle of forty-five performances, the play found its place in the literature of the country. The battle was actually fought on the Théâtre Français, after some changes were made by the censor. The public had shown that it wished a liberty in governmental affairs that was coupled with order. In like manner, they desired in literature a freedom that was at the same time artistic. "Ni talons rouges, ni bonnets rouges",** in society, in the state, or in letters. As soon as liberty in art was admitted, the principal question was solved. The only remaining obstacle to the practice of this assertion was the censor. To overcome this last nuisance was difficult. Hugo had to fight against it later when Le roi s'amuse was produced, November 23, 1832. After the first performance it was suspended, and the second night it was forbidden by the minister. This order was nothing short of an attack against liberty and against property rights. In spite of the efforts of the Théâtre Français to have the order revoked, the play was not allowed to continue. For the author to ask a favor of the minister would be to recognize his authority. This Victor Hugo would not do. He might have asked a privilege of a minister; but for a right, he would go to the people. In the preface of Le roi s'amuse Hugo says there are two ways of reaching the people; appealing to public opinion and to the courts. He made use of both. He was accused by the censor, of having made an imaginary reflection upon Louis

*Preface to Hernani. p. 6.

**Ibid. p. 4.

Philippe. However, he vindicated his meaning and asserted his rights before a tribunal in so eloquent and manly a way, that they could not answer him. What, then, was the motive at the bottom of such a measure? Another reason for condemning the play was that it was immoral. Triboulet, the jester, is deformed and sick. He hates the king because he is king; the nobles because they are nobles; and men because they are not crippled. He has two pupils, the king whom he instructs in vice, and his daughter whom he educates in virtue. When he urges the king to take the wife of M. de Cossé, M. de St. Vallier denounces him for it. The play might have been called La Malédiction de M. de St. Vallier, for the tragedy of the situation comes when this curse falls upon the person loved best by Triboulet, his daughter.

The jester sets a trap to avenge himself on the king, but his daughter falls into it and he kills her. The idea of the play may not be dramatic; but who can say it is not moral? As in Hernani we find fate permeating the play, so in Le roi s'amuse there is a providence, not always kind.

The fourth act shows the king with a servant from an inn. This scheme, not original with Hugo, offended the taste of the censor. Such a situation was often found in Shakespeare and sometimes in Greek drama. There is nothing immoral in this play. It is necessary to look further for the motive that caused the censor to forbid it. He does not dare to tell it openly, scarcely does he dare to confess it to himself. The country made rapid strides forward in the Revolution of July 1830. After two years there was a tendency to let down. The situation was easy to understand but hard to define. It was not because the people were indifferent to the ideas of freedom; it was a lassitude which is a natural reaction from such tense feelings. All the earlier plays of Hugo, Marion de Lorme, Hernani, and Le roi s'amuse were stopped for a longer or shorter period. In 1832,

Hernani had had fifty-three performances, Marion de Lorme sixty-one. If the edict of the minister was to stand, Le roi s'amuse would have only one representation. The harm done to the author is inestimable. When the government censor will have been abolished, the poet will be his own censor. That will be one way of raising the drama from mediocrity and giving it the dignity it deserves. "Quand on a toute liberté, il sied de garder toute mesure".*

Hugo is not pleading for himself alone, but for the freedom of art. He places the man and his work against the minister and his acts and asks for the cooperation of all. The open and cordial support of the press, the equity of the courts can render him his rights.

The dramatic censor was hostile to all the writers of the new school. Victor Hugo had more than the other authors to say against the censor because he was more aggressive. Alfred de Vigny wrote Le More de Venise, a translation of Shakespeare's Othello, which was produced at the Théâtre Français on the evening of October 24, 1829. In the Lettre à Lord . . . * he wrote, "J'ai eu ma soirée mon cher lord, et voilà tout. Une soirée décide de l'existence ou de l'anéantissement d'une tragédie, elle est même, je vous assure, toute sa vie".** He, too, realized that the theater was the most direct way of reaching the people. The question he wished to bring before the public was whether the French theater was going to accept or reject a tragedy that had for its conception a broad outlook on life, and had in its composition real, living characters, and a style that was free and open with a combination of tragedy and comedy.

The audiences of a French theater were often organized into groups ready to hiss or applaud a new play. They looked upon each new play as a battle in a

*Published as Preface to Le More de Venise.

**Alfred de Vigny - Oeuvres Complètes, Ed. définitive. Vol. II, p. 68.

big campaign. It is not to be wondered at that de Vigny said each play might take the name of the day it was presented. "On ne peut le nier: faire jouer une tragédie n'est autre chose que préparer une soirée, et le véritable titre doit être la date de la représentation. Le More de Venise ne doit pas se nommer autrement pour moi que le 24 octobre 1829."* Le More de Venise was not rejected by either the censor or the audience. This miracle, as de Vigny calls it, was no doubt due to the fact that the French had already accepted Shakespeare in English. The translation was able to reach more people, and was not essentially different from the original. Although his drama was not cut or changed, de Vigny did not hesitate to say that the censor was one of the biggest obstacles in the forward movement of the Romantic drama. The censor forbade any profound study of the two classes upon which modern civilization rests - the priest and the king. A mere sketch is all the authors could make, even those who were serious in their purpose and sought to study their characters. The censorship was abolished by La Charte de 1830; but from time to time it was reestablished; for dramatic work we find it brought back by a law of September 9, 1835.** The dramatists who were making a real fight for their cause, were having a disloyal war waged against them. Victor Hugo had faith in the future outcome; for he felt that liberalism in literature would soon become as popular as political liberalism. In a revolution every step means advancement. It may not be visible at the time, but it is true that everything which works either for or against liberty serves it equally.

B. Dramatic Theories.

The protests against Classicism predominate in the Préface de Cromwell over the constructive dramatic theories. The Romantic writers were far more cer-

*Ibid. p. 70.

**Censure in Nouveau Larousse Illustré.

tain of what they did not want than of what they did, and their works written in accordance with their theories are in general less important than the destructive influence of the theories. Hugo urged them to do away with rules and models, and at the same time he laid down certain principles that he thought should be incorporated in the Romantic drama, such as the writing of drama in verse, the mingling of the grotesque and beautiful. The later prefaces of Hugo deal more with dramatic theories that are constructive. The aim of dramatic poetry, for him, is to seek the great as we find it in Corneille, and the true, as is found in Molière.* The highest summit of genius is in portraying truth in greatness and greatness in truth, for in this combination only is art complete. Shakespeare has joined these qualities in a remarkable degree. He exaggerates the size of his characters, but always keeps the true proportions. Hamlet is colossal and real. "Hamlet, ce n'est pas un homme, c'est l'homme!"** Greatness appeals to the masses, truth to the individual. These two words are the epitome of the aim of the drama, for in them are found beauty and morality. Marie Tudor*** was written with this idea in view. The heroine is depicted as a queen who is at the same time a woman; great as a queen, true as a woman.

The ideal of the nineteenth century drama was life viewed from all sides at the same time. If any man could attain this ideal, his work would be the human heart, head, passion and will; it would be good, evil, high, low, fate, providence, genius, chance, society, nature, and above all there would be an element of grandeur.**** In order to create such a drama, the poet must necessarily have two qualities - genius and conscience, a conscience that will hold him to his ideal and genius to attain it. The same idea is expressed in a different way in

*Preface to Marie Tudor in Oeuvres Complètes. Vol. III, p. 133.

**Ibid. p. 134.

***1833.

****Ibid. p. 135.

the preface to Ruy Blas.* Of the three kinds of drama, tragedy, comedy and melodrama one is inferior and two superior, but each satisfies a certain need. They appeal to three kinds of spectators, whom Hugo classifies as women, thinkers and the crowd. All of them are seeking pleasure; women find it in tragedy in which their emotions are aroused by the development of passion; the thinkers are interested in the characters and find pleasure in comedy which gives a picture of humanity; the crowd seeks action, such as the melodrama gives. In a very general sense and for the sake of argument, this classification may be accepted. Taken in this broad sense, all three are right in demanding what they do. From the three diverse interests, a general law for the drame may be deducted: it is to make the characters live and put into them passions that develop some and modify others. By so doing, the drame includes and enriches the other two great forms of dramatic art. It contains tragedy by depicting the passions, and comedy by creating characters. "De cette façon, les deux électricités opposées de la comédie et de la tragédie se rencontrent, et l'étincelle qui en jaillit, c'est le drame."**

The drame will thus display human life, that is to say events which have for the heart a pleasure called interest and for the mind a lesson called the moral. With this as an ideal Victor Hugo wrote Ruy Blas. From the point of view of the philosophy of history, what is the meaning in Ruy Blas? In history we find that the fall of a monarchy leaves a country with no police force, no army, no finances.

Some of the nobility seek to make their fortune at the expense of the country; others seek power. Still others, thinking the world is at its end, retire to their châteaux and spend their wealth lavishly. It does not take long for them to awaken to the fact that they are ruined before their country. In times such as these, those who were used to living in the upper ranks of society

*Written 1838. Oeuvres Complètes, Vol. IV.

**Preface to Ruy Blas. p. 77.

must become accustomed to living in the lower. There remains nothing of their nobility save honor, name and sword. Such was the condition of Spain at the end of the seventeenth century. In this play, Don Salluste represents the nobility which seeks wealth and power, and Don César the spendthrift. Under this divided nobility there is in the shadow something great, somber and unknown. It is the people. They are intelligent and strong, living always in the future. Upon their backs are marks of servitude but in the heart the hopes and thoughts of a genius. They love only one person, the one who represents to them authority and charity. The people is Ruy Blas. Above all three of these men who so well show the monarchy of the seventeenth century in Spain, walks a pure and lovely creature, a woman and a queen. Unhappy as woman and as queen, she looks below her where her royal pity and womanly instinct take her gaze. It meets that of Ruy Blas, who from below loves her. Charles II may be added as a fifth; but he is really nothing but a shadow.

This of course, is the play of Ruy Blas from one angle only. Take a purely human attitude, and the reactions are entirely different. The characters at once lose some of their idealism and appear as men. Don Salluste is in that light absolute egotism; Don César quite the opposite, disinterested and carefree; Ruy Blas is genius and passion curbed by the society in which he lives, aspiring higher as his oppression becomes more violent; the queen is virtue weakened by ennui. There is still another aspect of the play which is purely literary. Don Salluste is the drama which ties up the action; Don César the comedy which confuses it and Ruy Blas tragedy which cuts it.

Each of these points of view is true and just but no one of them is complete. Philosophically speaking, Ruy Blas is a people aspiring to a higher level. As a human subject, he is a man loving a woman. But for a dramatic subject, he is a lackey loving a queen. The crowd sees the dramatic side; women the human side while thinkers get the philosophic aspect. Victor Hugo emphasizes the

historical side of Ruy Blas, in which it resembles Hernani. Two centuries pass between Hernani and Ruy Blas. In the former the sun of the house of Austria rises, in the latter it sets. This is the substance of this interesting preface, which gives an insight into the workings of Victor Hugo's mind.

The classic tragedy began with the dénouement of an action already developed when the curtain rises. That is the reason it lacks scenes and development, which is, to many minds, a serious defect. The drame can use all the time it desires, create men who are really individuals, which is the only way to interest man. Alfred de Vigny tried above everything else to convince the public that progress was necessary. It was perfectly evident to him that the former system of tragedy was quite in harmony with its age. The French people were holding to the old order of things in literature as a matter of politeness. That alone was capable of calling a character which was true to life, vulgar; or ordinary language, trivial. The way to progress is to use the good of the past to help bring a better future. Alfred de Vigny does not give any definite dramatic theories, except for the breaking of the rules of the unities. He as well as Hugo accepts only the unity of interest in the action. The two other unities restrict the drama too much. They were well suited to the type of tragedy written by Racine and Corneille, who treated ancient subjects. The people of the nineteenth century have shown that they want a more natural drama, with personages like themselves. This sort of drama is impossible to write according to the old form. The style would not fit the subject of the play. For this reason, the modern writers could not imitate the writers of classic tragedy. "Chaque homme, dans sa conversation habituelle, n'a-t-il pas ses formules favorites, ses mots coutumiers nés de son éducation, de sa profession, de ses goûts, appris en famille, dictés par un esprit passionné ou froid, calculateur ou candide? N'a-t-il pas des comparaisons de prédilection et tout un vocabulaire journalier auquel un ami le reconnaîtrait, sans entendre sa voix, à la tournure seule d'une phrase qu'on

lui redirait? Faut-il donc toujours que chaque personnage se serve des mêmes mots, des mêmes images, que tous les autres emploient aussi?"* Neither Shakespeare nor Molière was lacking in giving to the men of their plays this characteristic touch which makes them real. It cannot be done in the vers épiques of the French tragedy. "Il leur a fallu déguiser le mot simple sous le manteau de la périphrase ou le masque du mot antique. C'est un cercle vicieux d'où nulle puissance ne les eût fait sortir".** The converse of this statement is just as true. One cannot think of a harsh or vulgar word in the exquisite verse of Racine; it would have had the effect of an oath from the mouth of a young girl. Alfred de Vigny does not express himself as strongly as does Victor Hugo on the use of verse only for the drama. One is inclined to believe that he preferred verse not, however, to the absolute exclusion of prose. He does not agree with the English idea of combining the two; and of course, the French language is little adapted to blank verse. It is interesting to note the esteem that Alfred de Vigny has for Shakespeare; like Victor Hugo, he places him above all other dramatists. In making a translation of Othello, he had no idea of imitating the great man, for he says, "Toute traduction est faite pour ceux qui n'entendent pas la langue mère et n'est faite que pour eux: c'est ce que la critique perd de vue trop souvent. Une traduction est seulement à l'original ce qu'est le portrait à la nature vivante Un imitateur de Shakespeare serait aussi faux dans notre temps que le sont les imitateurs d'Athalie. Encore une fois, nous marchons, et quoique Shakespeare ait atteint le plus haut degré peut-être où puisse atteindre la tragédie moderne, il l'a atteint selon son temps.***"

Another important dramatist of this new movement was Alexandre Dumas. His prefaces are far less serious than either Hugo's or de Vigny's. The preface

*Alfred de Vigny. Lettre à Lord ... p. 84.

**Ibid. p. 85.

***Ibid. pp. 91-3.

to Henri III et sa cour* is more of an expression of appreciation than anything else. Dumas was not a leader in this school. He says that Hugo, Mérimée and Dittmer made the system and he is only following them. But we find that he did not always follow exactly. He gives two reasons for writing the preface; first, to dedicate it to M. le baron Taylor in recognition of his help in starting Dumas on his dramatic career; second, to thank the actors and actresses for the splendid way they presented the play. Two years later he gave more specific ideas about the drama, that were much more liberal than those of any of the other exponents of the modern drama. At that time he published Charles VII** . He took the subject from a history of Charles VII***. It was a classical subject, and Dumas made no apology for treating it as a classical drama. He believed that the theater could not be held down by any system either classic or romantic. Each author must be his own master, select his own subjects and develop them in whatever way is best suited to them. Give everyone full liberty, from the twelve hours of Boileau to the thirty years of Shakespeare, the vers libre of Jodelle to the exquisite Alexandrine verse of Racine, then each writer will do his own work, which will perhaps not be remarkable, but at least individual. Because of his belief in absolute freedom for the author, he wrote Charles VII as a classic tragedy. "J'ai verrouillé mes trois unités dans les dix pieds carrés de la chambre basse du comte Charles de Savoisy****". The characters represented types rather than individuals. Dumas consciously made Yaqoude personify slavery in the Orient, Raymond, servitude in the Occident; the count typified the old feudal system, while the king was monarchy*****.

Unlike Hugo's idea is that of Dumas, that the ultimate end of the theater is to amuse and interest. Dumas was not at all bothered by the rules of the unities

*Alexandre Dumas. Henri III et sa cour. 1829.

**Oct. 20, 1831.

***Chronique du roi Charles VII by Alain Chartier.

****Preface to Charles VII in Théâtre. Vol. II, p. 228.

*****Ibid. p. 228.

or by the problem of whether to write in verse or in prose. He was in sympathy with the progress this new movement was making because he welcomed the liberty which it made possible for writers; but he seems to be merely watching the procession pass, applauding what happened to suit him and paying little attention to the rest. He had not had the opposition to endure that Hugo had faced. M. Taylor had encouraged him in almost every play he produced. After the death of his father, he and his mother did not receive the pensions the government owed them. For a short time Dumas held a position in the home of the Duc d'Orléans, which paid enough to support him and his mother. When Henri III et sa cour was first given*, the duke went and applauded after having done all he could to prevent its presentation. This play opened a new career for Dumas. He continued writing dramas which were received with a certain enthusiasm, but which have not lasted as great plays. Christine, which was produced in 1830, was dedicated to the Duc d'Orléans who thereupon requested the Croix de la Légion d'Honneur for the author. The government was at that time turning the attention of the public away from literature to politics. It did not confer this honor upon Dumas because it would bring him more felicitations. This, at least, is what Dumas would have us believe to be the reason. Later he was asked to write a drama on Napoleon; several directors urged him to do this, but Dumas was not able to get permission from the king. While he was waiting for his request to be granted, six theaters produced plays on Napoleon, making each time the success of his drama less likely. Finally, he began his play on the twenty-fifth of October, and finished it in nine days. It was after its first performance that Dumas was attacked by some of his enemies on three things, his private life, his political opinions and his dramatic theories. Because of these slanderous attacks, he wrote the preface to Napoléon to answer these men and clear his name before the public.

*February 11, 1829.

C. Victor Hugo's Use of Contrast.

Before the appearance of Le roi s'amuse Hugo had written a play which he preferred not to release until after the first performance of the former. This play was called Le Souper à Ferrare. The trouble over Le roi s'amuse caused by the censor seemed to make him all the more determined in his idea for freedom in art. In December 1832, the director of the Porte St. Martin asked him for that play. The name was changed to Lucrèce Borgia and it was produced the twelfth of February 1833. It is perhaps the best constructed of his plays from the point of view of plot. From the beginning to the end, everything works towards the dénouement without a single stop. However melodramatic it may be, the action is unified and in this respect it may be compared to a classic tragedy. Another classical element is that the Borgia family is pushed on to crime by a sort of fatality. Yet to this the author adds a new element, which is a moral idea. He makes the crime the result of the punishment of crime. The play is not at all classical in form, being in three acts and in prose. One is somewhat surprised to find that Hugo has written this drama in prose, not many years after he declared, in the Préface de Cromwell, that the Alexandrine verse was the proper medium for the drame.

In the preface that accompanies this play, he gave a three-fold mission of the theater - national, social, and human. He, above all the other dramatists, proclaimed this responsibility. "L'auteur de ce drame sait combien c'est une grande et sérieuse chose que le théâtre. Quand il voit chaque soir ce peuple si intelligent et si avancé s'entasser en foule devant un rideau que sa pensée, à lui chétif poète, va soulever, il sent combien il est peu de chose, lui, devant tant d'attente et de curiosité; il sent que si son talent n'est rien, il faut que

sa probité soit tout; il s'interroge avec sévérité et recueillement sur la portée philosophique de son oeuvre; car il se sait responsable, et il ne veut pas que cette foule puisse lui demander compte un jour de ce qu'il lui aura enseigné. Le poète aussi a charge d'âmes".* The theater serves as both tribune and pulpit and its importance grows with the development of civilization.

With this serious purpose as a goal, Hugo makes use of certain devices in style, of which the most apparent is his use of contrast. He has been called antithesis itself, for he always used this means of making his ideas bold and strong. Throughout Hugo's writings there is that perpetual conflict between opposing forces. A few examples may be picked at random from his dramas that will show this characteristic. In Hernani, the young king of the first part of the play is contrasted to the serious minded emperor that he becomes later, besides being opposed through the entire play to the hero, Hernani. In Ruy Blas there is the contrast of the two classes of nobles represented by Don Salluste and Don César; in addition to this the love of a lackey for a queen. But perhaps more apparent than in all the others, is the antithesis in Lucrèce Borgia and in Le roi s'amuse. Hugo asserts in the preface to Lucrèce Borgia that these two plays come from one idea, different as they are in form and background. Triboulet has a most hideous physical deformity. He is absolutely repulsive to look upon, the lowest and most scorned in society. He has, however, a soul that is endowed with the purest love a man can have, that of a father. Now in Lucrèce Borgia there is a most hideous and complete moral deformity. This is put in the most striking place possible, in the heart of a woman endowed with great physical beauty. Mingled with this moral deformity is the purest love of a woman, maternal love; and the ugly soul appears beautiful. The one is a fatherhood sanctifying a physical deformity: the other maternity purifying moral deformity. "Ces deux pièces ne fer-

*Preface to Lucrèce Borgia in Oeuvres Complètes. Vol. III. p. 7.

aient qu'une bilogie qui pourrait avoir pour titre le Père et la Mère. Le sort les a séparés, qu'importe? L'une a prospéré, l'autre a été frappée d'une lettre de cachet; l'idée qui fait le fond de la première restera longtemps encore peut-être voilée par mille préventions à bien des regards, l'idée qui a engendré la seconde semble être chaque fois, si aucune illusion ne nous aveugle, comprise et acceptée par une foule intelligente et sympathique"*. The drama can touch anything without soiling it, because amid the horrors of life, it places compassion and love. Marion de Lorme is given a bit of pure love, Triboulet the heart of a father and Lucrèce the compassion of a mother. There is nothing repulsive and horrible if there is a sympathetic compassion. "A la chose la plus hideuse mêlez une idée religieuse, elle deviendra sainte et pure. Attachez Dieu au gibet, vous avez la croix"***.

Hugo's dramatic career ended with Les Burgraves, produced March 25, 1843. The Romantic drama had become established years before this; accordingly the author explains in the preface the circumstances that led him to write the play and the ideas that were behind it. It is divided into three parts instead of five acts. Hugo felt that the drama should be written in the most logical form and not made to fit into five acts. During a trip along the Rhine, he observed both people and places, in order to write Le Rhin. At the same time he got the idea for a drama. The Rhineland was like Thessaly, the battleground of Jupiter and the Titans: the Titans in this case were the burgraves and Jupiter the German emperor. The parallel between fiction and reality is very remarkable in this case. There is a great abyss between the Titans and modern civilization while a few generations only separate us from the burgraves***. One can admire them because they are great and understand them because they are real. In a subject such as this

*Ibid. p. 5.

**Ibid. p. 9.

***Preface to Les Burgraves. p. 245

one, the imagination of the poet is aroused by a reality that awakens interest, a grandeur that inspires poetry and a novelty which impassions the crowd.

In the solitude of Hurg's walks along the Rhine, every building, every stone and tree stood as a testimony to the great struggle. The burgraves appeared to him, day and night, like phantoms. These men had three suits of armor; first, one made of courage and worn in the heart; second, of steel which covered their bodies; third, of granite which was the strongholds. The author's purpose was to reconstruct in thought one of these princely châteaux in which the burgraves lived and to represent in the burg the three things it used to have - the fortress, the palace and the cavern. In this burg, he placed four generations and showed the degradation possible throughout the generations represented in the play. The crime of the grandfather was murder committed in a passion: the father had in his heart the instincts of Nimrod; the son was corrupted by the vices of Sardanapalus and the grandson had the capability of committing a crime through passion, ferocity and corruption inherited from all three ancestors. "Poser de cette façon devant tous et rendre visible à la foule cette grande échelle morale de la dégradation des races qui devrait être l'exemple vivant éternellement dressé aux yeux de tous les hommes et qui n'a été jusqu'ici entrevue que par les songeurs et les poètes; donner une figure à cette leçon des sages; faire de cette abstraction philosophique une réalité dramatique palpable, saisissante, utile".

Two great and mysterious powers must intervene to complete the morality of the play, a fate which will punish and a providence which will pardon. The former is represented by a woman, who alone can show complete servitude. She has in her heart the passion of darkness and the science of darkness. She personifies Fate. It was just as necessary to have a sovereignty above the burgraves as slavery below it. Joining legend with history, the author made the Emperor personify

Providence. In the dénouement, it was his intention to show that fate may be broken by providence and hatred overcome by love.

Whatever else a drama is, legend, history or poem, it must contain above all nature and humanity. As there must be some ray of light in this somber picture, he painted two souls which loved each other. It was not enough to bring out the contrast between the father and son, or the burgrave and emperor. "Ayez la terreur, mais ayez la pitié. Sous ces griffes d'acier, sous ces pieds de pierre, faites broyer le coeur humain"*.

Les Burgraves was far from being a purely fantastic idea of the author. In it, Hugo endeavored to do for Europe what Aeschylus had done for Greece in recounting the story of the Titans. The patrie of the poet is all civilization, with no boundary save the somber and fatal line where barbarism begins.

D. Alfred de Vigny's Preface to Chatterton.

Alfred de Vigny wrote his play Chatterton in seventeen months. When he published it, there was also a preface which he called Dernière Nuit de Travail du 29 au 30 juin 1834. This preface stands alone in substance and in style. It does not deal with dramatic theories nor, except indirectly, with the play of Chatterton. It is a plea for poets. The author gives his motive for writing the play; after having worked so long, he knows there will be many who will not appreciate the real meaning of it. Many will read and enjoy, but few will have their hearts changed by it. Some will admire its style and its arguments; others will laugh at its somberness, but none will be deeply moved. The real cause that is pleaded in Chatterton is the perpetual martyrdom and sacrifice of a poet. No one understands the sort of life he must live. A nation boasts, if it has even one

*Ibid. p. 251.

truly great poet in many centuries; yet people act as if a poet were a common person.

There are three sorts of men who influence society through the channel of thought, each working in fields absolutely distinct, one from the other. The man who is conventional in his manners and in his works, who writes of the affairs of the day, exercising his talent equally well in criticism or in works of art, who can write comedy or a funeral oration, couplet or political discourse; who appeals to a common crowd, this man is the "man of letters". He is found in great numbers and is always loved. Since he does not bother anyone, he does as he pleases and goes about wherever he wishes. That man needs no pity. Above him is a man stronger and of a better nature. He is studious and calm, drawing his inspiration from some conviction that is deeply rooted within himself. His language is clear, frank and vigorous. More independent than the man of letters, he keeps the sympathy of the public by mastering himself. This one is the truly "great writer". He does not have to struggle, but he meets courteous opposition. Whether conqueror or vanquished he is praised and has no need of pity.

However, there is a third man who is of a more sensitive nature. He comes upon the earth at rarer intervals, fortunately for himself, unfortunately for the human race. Imagination possesses him entirely and it carries his faculties towards heaven as irresistibly as a balloon raises its basket. He is sensitive above all others to everything. Because of this fact he becomes morbid, stays away from people and broods. His mind, so full of beautiful "verses", is sick from lack of sympathy. He is the poet. All the sympathetic understanding one can give him is his due. He lives in abject poverty and often dies for want of the bare necessities of life.

Alfred de Vigny suggests three ways for the righting of this injustice. He does not think that either of them is the just way, for they are only what the

poet himself might do under existing circumstances. The wrong lies upon society and not upon the poet. In the first place, the poet may give up his intellectual life and live as a soldier; or he may become a "man of letters" or even "a great writer". In either case he kills a part of himself, his poetic imagination. Chatterton chose to kill himself, thus becoming a criminal before God and man. Reason and duty prove suicide to be a religious and social crime. Despair is, on the other hand, an irresistible power which overcomes reason. It is more than an idea. It is a thing which so holds the heart of a man, that it actually throws him into death. Is the crime then upon the poet, or upon the society which gives him no help? Beautiful verses do not find an abundant market in any land; and the people of France do not seem less ordinary in their tastes than the majority. All the poet asks is bread and time for meditation. People continue to say to him, "Despair and die".

Upon this subject, Alfred de Vigny has based this tragedy. For him, literary theories were the vainest things. He was continually astonished at the men who propounded their dramatic theories believing in good faith, that they would endure. There can be no master or school of poetry or drama because the only master is genius, and genius will not follow or imitate anyone. The time had come for a drama of thought in which the idea was very simple, the action more in the heart and mind than of a material sort. In Chatterton, the story is extremely simple. It is the tale of a poet who writes a letter in the morning, waits for a response until evening. Then, when the answer comes, it kills him. No action to speak of except in the heart of the poet and of the young woman he loved, also in the old man who misunderstood him. It is a spiritual man buffeted by a materialistic society. The play is in no way an attempt to justify his act, but it is a strong protest against the indifference of the people who brought it about.

We find the same thought expressed by Hugo in the preface to Hernani.

The author, speaking of the death of a young poet, asks whether it is sadder to die young or to live and struggle. The fight for liberty in art was unfair; the majority of the people were against the poet. Because of the attitude of the public, the poet often looks with envy upon those who are dead. However, Hugo does not dwell on this aspect of the poet's life, for he is too much interested in the mission of the poet. The obstacles that he has to overcome make his works all the richer and more valuable. This is indeed true of Hugo's own career. He forged ahead in spite of his enemies. A poet who is dependent upon some minister is weak and does not have the ideal vision which is such an essential part of the life of a poet. Both Hugo and de Vigny have the same conception of the poet's mission. The former urged the poet to recognize his leadership, have before him an ideal and go towards it in spite of everything and everybody. The latter has a more aristocratic point of view. The poet should have support from the public so that he might attain his goal without concern for his bodily comfort. The difference in these two points of view gives us an insight into the true nature of the two men.

CHAPTER IV.

Conclusion.

The struggle for the Romantic drama lasted about fifteen years. The Préface de Cromwell was the first attempt to put before the eyes of the theater-going public the need for a drama more fitting for that age than the conventional classical drama, an imitation of the style in vogue in previous centuries. The Revolution had brought changes that were felt in every class of society. The whole social life had to be reconstructed on a new basis. The theater, acknowledged to be a vital factor in the life of the nation, was the last element to let go of the old traditions. The ideas of the classical drama were hard to leave behind. Although the Préface de Cromwell aroused great excitement in the world of letters, it was only the beginning of the bitter fight. The actual struggle came in the theater where, night after night, the plays were given before audiences that hissed and applauded. The public was the court of appeal and it gave the judgment. The première of Hernani stands out in the history of the French drama as equal in importance to the first performance of the Cid*. It was the turning point in the drama of the early part of the nineteenth century. From that day until the appearance and subsequent failure of Les Burgraves, the theater was the center of attention. Victor Hugo, Alfred de Vigny, and Alexandre Dumas were the most prominent dramatists. The Romantic movement, although of short duration, has influenced modern drama to a marked degree. The greatest thing achieved by it was freedom from the restrictions of the past. Individualism and originality were

more appreciated than tradition and imitation. The drame was not, however, left without any restrictions. Victor Hugo, more than the other exponents of this school, was convinced that he was establishing new principles that would be followed by dramatists in the future. He decried many of the rules of the classical drama and at the same time set forth certain laws to be followed by the Romantics. Fortunately, these authors kept the good features both of the classical tragedy and of the melodrama. They combined the artistic element of the former with the action and variety of the latter. The plots of Victor Hugo's plays are melodramatic, but they are written in a poetic style which is their chief charm.

The fact that Hugo wrote a preface to practically every play, leads one to conclude that he believed thoroughly in the seriousness of the undertaking and in his own importance. In one of his prefaces he said that the poet who can create a drame must have two qualities, conscience and genius, of which he himself, had only the former. "A l'homme qui créera ce drame, il faudra deux qualités, conscience et génie. L'auteur qui parle ici n'a que la première, il le sait. Il n'en continuera pas moins ce qu'il a commencé, en désirant que d'autres fassent mieux que lui".* This mock humility is manifested in his other prefaces, too. There was certainly no man who was more aware of his ability than Victor Hugo. His remarks on his lack of genius only make more apparent his true idea of himself and of his own importance as a great writer and the leader of a school.

Alfred de Vigny and Alexandre Dumas were less radical in their expression of dramatic theories. They were in accordance with Hugo in the desire to get away from the tradition of the past, but they were not as eager to establish a new system as he was. This is especially true of Dumas. He stood for freedom for each individual author. The dramatist must be his own master in regard to style and subject matter. His works are only to amuse and interest the public. While de

*Preface to Marie Tudor. p. 136.

Vigny was not willing to concede that there should be no restrictions, he was very strong in his plea for progress. The drama must develop along with society. Where there is no progress, there is retrogression. In a most striking simile, de Vigny points to the face of a huge clock which is a faithful image of society at any age. The hour hand, which one can scarcely see moving, represents the crowd whose progress is not perceptible. The minute hand, which travels in five minutes the space covered by the hour hand in one hour, represents the number of people who are more intelligent than the average of the crowd. Still another hand which moves very rapidly; this one is the poet. He always has and always must go ahead of the general trend of thought of his nation. All of these are governed by the pendulum which moves back and forth in an invariable rhythm; to continue the figure, the pendulum is a true symbol of the law of progress*.

Accordingly, the Romantic drama was a decisive step forward. It gave the death blow to the pseudo-classical drama; it put an emphasis on local color that opened the way for a more realistic drama; it made the Alexandrine verse less restricted and formal; and it gave to each author the right to be individual. The works which it produced are not as great as the tragedies of the seventeenth century, but its originality justifies its struggle for existence. We are indebted to the men who worked so arduously for the freedom they brought to dramatic art.

The prefaces of Victor Hugo, taken together and studied as a unit, give a broad view of his dramatic theory and method. Much of his argument, particularly in the Préface de Cromwell, will hardly stand logical analysis, but in eloquent fashion the prefaces carry on the finally successful struggle in behalf of liberty in art. Alfred de Vigny reinforces this idea in his preface to More de Venise and of course the same discussion, with arguments pro and con, is carried on in other writings beside these prefaces. But it has seemed worth while to consider

*Lettre à Lord...p. 97.

them particularly and to determine in how far they are consistent with each other and with the general tendencies of the Romantic school.

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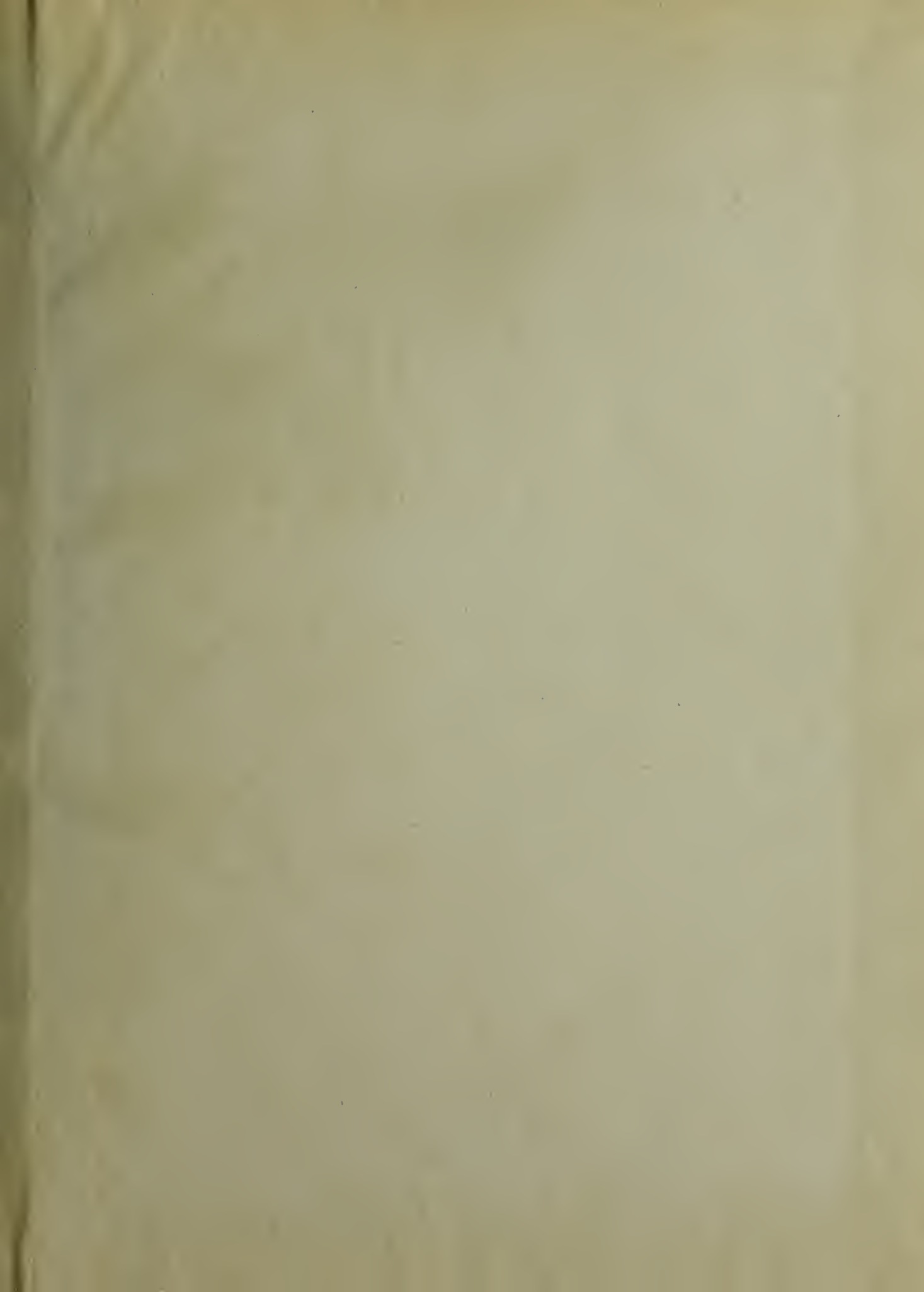
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